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ABSTRACT

The results of the first year of a five year study on the effects of television on the Inuit population indicate that traditional-modern and childrearing attitudes have remained constant over the year and that television had virtually no effect on these attitudes. The Inuit are concerned about the impact of television on the traditional life style of the community. In terms of childrearing practices, the Inuit families are characterized by permissiveness and encouragement of independence at young ages. Television presents substantially different childrearing practices. Researchers visiting Nain in 1975 before the advent of television, interviewed through interpreters sixty-six parents of children in kindergarten and grade one. The parents were administered a traditional-modern scale based on the work of Guthrie (1970) and a Parental Attitude Scale developed by Shoben (1949). All scales were administered again approximately one year later, after television was available. Questions were also asked on entertainment activities and viewing time. Overall, there were no major changes in childbearing attitudes, with parents scoring high on "dominating" and "ignoring" scales, and low on the "possessive" scale, both before and after the advent of television. (Author/MC)

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association, Victoria, June 1976

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THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION ON THE INUIT POPULATION OF NAIN, LABRADOR

L.J. Taylor

The present paper is a preliminary report of the results of the first year of a five-year study on the effects of television on the Inuit population of Nain, Labrador. Nain is an isolated, mainly Inuit community, on the Northern coast of Labrador. It is in fact the most northern year-round settlement in Labrador. Travel is limited to bush plane and boat in the summer and bush plane in the winter. As there are no landing strips on most of the Labrador coast plane travel is irregular. On the whole the community is basically a subsistence level fishing community with little direct or regular contact with Southern Canada. The community maintains many of the traditional ways of living. For instance many families leave Nain and move to summer fishing camps and the winter caribou hunt is still important. As well, the Inuit language is still spoken by most of the people. There has been some loss by young people of the ability to accomplish traditional crafts but a determined effort is now being made to retain these. Overall there is a genuine concern that the traditional life style of the Inuit be protected from further encroachment by Southern Canadian standards. Thus with the advent of television from the CBC Northern network, concern has been expressed regarding the effects this might have on

the Inuit life style. This concern has been expressed verbally on numerous occasions as well as in a special issue of Inuit Today published by the Inuit Tapirisat.

> "We are worried that it (TV) is making our children forget their language and our past. It is teaching them white man's ways using a very attractive method."

There are many other comments similar to this one regarding a concern the Inuit have regarding the effects of television on native culture.

The purpose of the present research is to attempt to assess the effects of television on Inuit adults and children. Variables such as traditional-modern attitudes, childrearing practice, attitudes towards violence, and use of English, among others, will be assessed. The present report examines traditional-modern attitudes and childrearing practices. One of the important questions to be raised is whether television will affect attitudes of individuals in the community along a traditional-modern dimension. Research has indicated that rural hunting and gathering populations have relatively traditional attitudes in regard to such factors as higher status of male over female, the number of children in the family, the dominance of husband over wife and the role of the girl in the home among other variables (Grasmich, 1973; Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Kahl, 1965). As there is a genuine concern within the Inuit community to preserve much of the traditional culture there is real interest among the Inuit to discover the impact of television on the traditional life style of the community.

As well as traditional-modern attitudes the present report examines childrearing practices. Many investigators have examined family environments and the important role the family plays in various aspects of development. In terms of childrearing practices the Inuit families are characterized by permissiveness and encouragement of independence at young ages, as indicated by Berry (1971). Television will present childrearing practices substantially different from present practices of the Inuit. The present research will attempt to assess whether there are any changes in attitudes away from traditional patterns.

Methodology

The design for the research project is basically a pre-measure, continuing post-measure design. Researchers visited Nain in November 1975 before the advent of television. With the aid of interpreters the researchers interviewed parents who had children in kindergarten and grade one. This group was sampled as the research was interested in the effects television would have on young children in terms of attitudes towards violence and use of English grammar among other variables. The sample of sixty-six parents was administered a traditional modern scale based on the work of Guthrie (1970) and a Parental Attitude Scale developed by Shoben (1949). All scales were administered before the beginning of television and again approximately one year later. It is planned to visit Nain again over the next three years

to continue the assessment to examine changes over a number of years.

Data Analysis

The parental attitude scale provides three different scores representing parental attitudes in terms of ignoring possessive and dominating attitudes. The scores were analyzed by an analysis of variance. The analysis of the traditional-modern attitudes provided somewhat of a dilemma. Most previous researchers have summed scores from items to generate an overall traditional modern attitude score. However, in a recent paper Jones (1976) indicates that there is little support for the generation of overall traditionalism and modernism scores from either the so-called homogeneous scales or across separate T-M scales. For this reason the items on the traditional-modern attitude scales were analyzed separately.

Results and Discussion

As well as the more formal scales administered questions of general interest were asked. One of the issues dealt with entertainment activities. We were interested in discovering if entertainment patterns would change substantially with the advent of TV. One of the more popular forms of community entertainment prior to television were movies. In year one of the research 76% of the sample reported that they attended movies. However, in year two less than 5% of the sample report that they attended movies. The sample was also asked to report

their viewing time. About 50% report they view five or more hours of TV a day with one person reporting less than one hour of TV viewing per day. Overall these reports agree with previous research in Southern communities that television is the most common and time-consuming form of entertainment.

The parental attitude scale provides an indication of parental attitudes towards childrearing. As stated previously it is subdivided into three subscales, the dominating scale, possessive scale, and ignoring scale. A parent scoring high on the dominating scale would agree with items like "a child should always believe what his parents tell him"; a possessive parent would agree with an item like "babies are more fun than older children"; while a sample ignoring item is "children should not interrupt adult conversation". For the ignoring subscale with a range of 7-21 a low score is indicative of parental ignoring of child behavior. In the case of the present sample there was no significant change from year one to year two in terms of the ignoring subscale with the means for year one and year two being 18.57 and 17.44, respectively. The scores in the upper ranges of the scale indicate that in the present sample attitudes exist which are attentive to the child's behavior.

The possessive subscale has a range of 10-30 with higher scores indicating protective attitudes on behalf of parents. The means for years one and two were 12.31 and 14.09, respectively, significant at the 0.02 level. Over the period of a little more than a year there was a move towards holding

more possessive attitudes by parents. However, the attitude scores remain at the lower end of the possessive scale. This result agrees with previous studies which indicate that Inuit parents hold few protective attitudes and encourage independence at a young age. The planned continuation of the present research will discover if there is a trend to more possessive attitudes to the degree that families could be characterized as possessive over the period of the next three years.

The dominant subscale has a range of 9-27 with a high score indicating dominant attitudes on behalf of parents. The means for year one and year two were 22.8 and 21.97, respectively. These means did not differ significantly. These relatively high scores on the dominance subscale indicate that while the parents encourage independence, in situations where there is direct adult-child interaction parents feel they should control the interaction. Overall there have been no major changes in childrearing attitudes over the period of the research.

As stated previously the traditional-modern attitude scale was analyzed item by item. On only one item of the 22-item scale was there a significant difference between years one and two. The item related to who should choose the wife for a man and the attitudes shifted from traditional to modern. However, this result may be due to chance. Other than this instance there has been little attitude shift over the period of a year. However, of the 22 items assessing T-M attitudes scores indicating some attitude conflict were

discovered on 12 items. That is, these items were not scored as either traditional or modern but at some point in between indicating conflict between traditional and modern attitudes. Further there was little change in attitude conflict over the period of a year. At present no definite reasons can be provided for the conflict of attitudes expressed. They may be related to the fact that the school system and society in general is largely dominated by values different from Inuit culture which may lead to conflict. However, as the project continues it is planned to investigate this conflict in more detail and hopefully gain an understanding of the reasons for it. Overall it can be concluded that traditional-modern and childrearing attitudes have remained constant over the period of time the research was conducted and that television has had virtually no effect on these attitudes.

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